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Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's Comic Hauntings

Sarah Whitehead

1 There has been a growing critical acknowledgement of the close relationship between horror and humour in gothic texts over the last few decades (Sage, Wolfreys, Horner and Zlosnik) and as Horner and Zlosnik recognise, it is the gothic's preoccupation with surface that enables it to so easily embrace the comic as well as the tragic in narratives which operate on alternate levels of terror and humour ("Comic Gothic" 327). This seemingly incongruous mixing was, however, formally identified as early as 1765 by Horace Walpole in the preface to the second edition to what is widely regarded as the first gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*.[1] In his preface he defends the mingling of the tragic and the comic within the same text, citing Shakespeare as a precursive practitioner of the art, and in a later letter to his friend Elie de Beaumont on the subject of his novel he again focuses on the humorous features of his narrative, writing "If I make you laugh ... I shall be content" (Wright 382).

2 *The Castle of Otranto* is rife with comic excess and melodrama and Williams notes how its farcical plotline sometimes feels more like that of opera libretto than narrative prose fiction (108). Perhaps most memorable is the manner in which the rightful owner of the castle, Prince Alfonso, haunts the current inhabitants—Manfred, his family and their servants—by sending a series of gigantic body parts to spook the residents. The first is not exactly a body part, but the prince's helmet, which falls from the sky, squashing Manfred's son on his wedding day. Next to appear are a gigantic foot and a massive hand—both uncannily like those on the much smaller, i.e. lifesize statue of Alfonso which stands in the castle. The excessively theatrical nature of these hauntings, combined with banal mechanisms of revelations of hidden identities suggest a metafictive awareness on Walpole's part, particularly when one considers his introductory signalling of the humorous intent of his narrative in his preface. This paper considers how, two centuries later, such self-reflexive, bathetic poetics can be found in the ghost stories of the Anglo-Irish writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. Furthermore, rather than diminishing the terror in his texts, Le Fanu's liberal doses of

the comic gothic serve to further the underlying, almost modernist, uncertainty of his tales and their shadowy horrors. Indeed, as Sullivan puts it, "the most hideous apparitions are also, ineluctably, the funniest" (43).

Green Tea

3 Perhaps the most absurd haunting in the Le Fanu oeuvre is the phantom that haunts Reverend Jennings in his 1869 short story "Green Tea." Here the spectre of choice is a small black monkey which initially appears to Jennings on an early evening journey back to his London home, on the omnibus. The first things Jennings notes in the shadows of the bus are the animal's two eyes, which he thinks may be a couple of buttons or glass beads reflecting a reddish light. He leans closer to get a proper look and is greeted by a monkey's face. Le Fanu writes:

> I began now to perceive an outline of something black, and I soon saw, with tolerable distinctness, the outline of a small black monkey, pushing its face forward in mimicry to meet mine; those were its eyes, and I now dimly saw its teeth grinning at me. (18-19)

4 Appalled by the animal and its sneering expression, Jennings has a prod at it with his umbrella, only to find it goes straight through the creature. No conventional trappings of a Victorian ghost here, no clanking of Marley's chains or torturous wails, and the revelation that this is not an escaped pet as Jennings presumed, but a "sulky" (20) phantom is a surprise for both the reader and Jennings alike. Le Fanu's choice of the ghost of an animal which has been associated with comic mimicry and trickery from classical times is unnerving in its incongruity.[2] That the perception of the unexpected, anomalous or inappropriate can prompt laughter was formally recognised as early as the fourth century BC by Aristotle, and the comedy of the incongruous continues to be a dominant theory of humour in philosophy and psychology (Morrell 10). In the case of Le Fanu's monkey however, the effect of this incongruity is as disturbing as it is amusing. Indeed, as Carroll argues, there is an "overlap" (156) between horror and humour when it comes to the aberrant, and Sage, in his study of Le Fanu's fiction, notes how the writer's use of the inappropriate or incongruous creates a comedy which can then "shade over" into something far darker ("Gothic Laughter" 12). Furthermore, whilst the opening description of the monkey's grin is initially suggestive of a laughing smile, the demonical descriptions that follow "shade" this image, which, as the narrative develops, becomes more like a menacing grimace.

5 The monkey follows Jennings home and proceeds to haunt him intermittently over the next few years. Jennings notes how its "sullen and sick" (21) appearance turns to one of intense malice. This suggestion of devilish intent is furthered by the halo of "red embers" (21) which appears around the creature at night. However its malignant ghostliness is not a traditional one in that it regularly appears during the day, and to Jennings' horror, even when he is leading the morning service:

> The thing exhibited an atrocious determination to thwart me. It was with me in the church—in the reading desk—in the pulpit—within the communion rails. At last, it reached this extremity, that while I was reading to the congregation, it would spring upon the open book and squat there, so that I was unable to see the page. (23)

6 There have been various critical readings of this ghostly animal, its simian ancestry linked to caricatures of the Irish that were prevalent at the time, as well as its

connections to Darwinism (Ledwon 12, Stoddardt 33), however perhaps the most striking quality of this figure is its more common association with laughter and comedy than the supernatural and the mixed effects it evokes. Le Fanu's ghostly monkey is gruesomely funny and its terrifying presence eventually drives the Reverend to commit suicide. Such a mixture of humour and horror presents a challenge for an illustrator given the lack of scope for ambiguity and multiple effects in a drawing. Indeed, Cuneo's picture of the Reverend and his monkey on the 1907 cover for the Newnes sixpenny novel edition of the story suggests that the comic gothic nature of the monkey was beyond the artist's pen.

Cover of Newnes 1907 sixpenny novel edition of 'Green Tea', illustrations by Cyrus Cuneo

7 In Cuneo's picture, the readers are presented with the illustrator's monolithic interpretation of the text: that of a haunted man, who, with his haggard face twisted uncomfortably towards the monkey, his bulging, seemingly possessed eyes and his claw-like hand held up in the air, seems far more malicious than the small black monkey, in a supplicant position with its hand held out as if it were about to be attacked. Cuneo's reading as depicted in his demonic looking Reverend fails to acknowledge any narrative sympathy for the persecuted "gentle ... kind" Jennings (30) who is the victim in the story and overlooks the malignancy of the spectral monkey. (It is ironic that red is used in both the background and the Reverend's vestments, yet the little black monkey is bereft of his red eyes.) Most notably, however, there is nothing disturbingly comic or darkly humorous in this picture created for mass production as part of a cheap edition. Cuneo's reading of the text, as depicted in his illustration, is a writerly version of Le Fanu's readerly text. Whereas the ambiguities and incongruities in Le Fanu's text nudge his readers towards filling in the gaps, such as that behind his

choice of ghost and how to react to it, Cuneo's text allows for no such ambiguities, particularly in his depiction of the monkey which is not funny, nor frightening, nor remotely ghost-like. Certainly in the case of this edition, it appears that the complexities of this comic gothic figure cannot be reduced to a simple picture.

"An Authentic Narrative of the Ghost of a Hand"

8 An equally funny, or incongruous, haunting in a short story written eight years earlier is that of a white, fat aristocratic hand. The story itself is presented as a stand-alone chapter in Le Fanu's 1861 novel *The House by the Churchyard*, and concerns the ghost of a hand which haunts the well-to-do tenants of the Tiled House. The first to see it is Mrs Prosser, the lady of the house. Le Fanu writes:

> [She] plainly saw a hand stealthily placed upon the stone window-sill outside, as if by some one beneath the window, at her right side, intending to climb up. There was nothing but the hand, which was rather short but handsomely formed, and white and plump, laid on the edge of the window-sill; and it was not a very young hand, but one aged, somewhere about forty, as she conjectured. (71)

9 Then the servants see it and are aware of its apparent intention to find some way of getting into the house. The cook sees "the same fat, but aristocratic—looking hand" and the maid sees "a white pudgy finger" (72) (obviously not belonging to someone who worked in the fields) pushing its way into an auger hole made in the window frame, in search of a fastening it could open.

10 The hand does finally succeed in coming indoors, leaving fingerprints in the dust of a parlour table and is later spotted in the upstairs bedrooms. The terror reaches its zenith when Mr Prosser discovers the same pale hand lying next to his wife's face on her pillow. Here Le Fanu narrates the moment with a bathetic comparison between the hand and some sort of awful albino toad:

> Her face [was] motionless, white, and covered with a cold dew; and on the pillow, close beside her head, and just within the curtains, was, as he first thought, a toad-- but really the same fattish hand, the wrist resting on the pillow, and the fingers extended towards her temple. (75)

11 Certainly the device of a single (disembodied) hand is not new in narratives of horror and precursive examples can be found in *Titus Andronicus* (1589) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614) as well as later uses of this trope by Maupassant in "The Flayed Hand" (1875), and Jacob in "The Monkey's Paw" (1902), however, rather than the traditional hand of glory, such as Maupassant's "dried black hand, with yellow nails, the muscles exposed and traces of old blood on the bones" (864), Le Fanu's hand is plump and white, and furthermore attached to a body, which is always, "by some crafty accident, hidden from view" (76). Its comic shape and the ingenious or "crafty" way by which its owner eludes detection by hiding behind a curtain, slipping through a door or remaining out of sight next to a window frame, adds a grotesque humour to the image and, like Jennings' monkey, is an apt example of the writer's predilection for "mixed effects" (Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic* 3). Le Fanu's use of the seemingly illogical or nonsensical—why a man would be haunted by a monkey or why a ghost would only show its hand, adds a haunting absurdity to these two tales, where the reader searches for reason behind these comic scenarios.

12 There is a bathetic quality to Le Fanu's description of the white hand on the pillow—the comparison is certainly to a reptile, but no serpent, just a garden toad with a rather unhealthy hue. The reduction of this haunting motif to that of a common amphibian found in local ponds and puddles gives it an everyday quality at odds with both its context of an account of the supernatural and an established narrative tradition of disembodied hands symbolising control beyond the grave, or literally mortmain. Originally referred to as *Peri Bathous or the Art of Sinking in Poetry*, by Alexander Pope, bathos is "a sudden transition from the elevated to the quotidian" (Stott 57) and Le Fanu's tale appears to hover between these two different modes. The chapter begins in the discourse of ancient folk lore which has been passed down generations, narrated by the servant "Old Sally," to the young Lilias late at night. Le Fanu opens by describing such stories as the one Sally will tell as "marvels, fabulae, what our ancestors called winter's tales" and in the same paragraph goes on to heighten the intrigue by having the narrator appeal to the rational listener to find a solution to the mystery, confessing that he "can't" (70). Much of the focus of the narrative is on the household's reaction to the haunting hand, and when an unexplained handprint appears in the dust in the little parlour table, the maid's terror is compared to that of Defoe's mythologised figure in the comment that "the print of the naked foot in the sea sand did not frighten Robinson Crusoe half as much" (74). This remark both heightens the sense of mental torture and elevates the story by is grandiose comparison to a seminal novel of the previous century. In his study of the genre, Stott goes on to describe bathos as "the puncturing intrusion of reality that deflates" (56) and, having set up this story of folkloric horror, this is exactly what Le Fanu does when he introduces a "white toad" on his wife's pillow, or refers to the hand at an earlier point as "fattish" or "pudgy", with the narrator's risible descriptions creating a bathetic twist to this tale of horror.

"A Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter"

13 A more traditionally horrific figure of the dead, and another "grim[ly] absurd" one (Sullivan 37), is Minheer Vanderhausen, who appears in Le Fanu's 1839 short story "A Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter." Vanderhausen's bodily condition, his telltale signs of having taken a cure for syphilis—his bluish skin, his black lips, combined with his unblinking eyes, and unmoving chest indicate that he is literally the living dead. His "long discoloured fangs" (128) give a vampiric finishing touch to le Fanu's theatrical caricature. As well as giving Vanderhausen such an extravagantly grotesque appearance, Le Fanu also uses two distinct comic modes in his description of the character: firstly the conversational, ironic tone in the aside that the peculiarly static nature of Vanderhausen's chest and eyes "when told may appear trifling" (129), and secondly, pure slapstick in the clumsy way in which Vanderhausen moves, as if the limbs were guided and directed by a spirit unused to "the management of bodily machinery," reminding his hosts of an old wooden painted figure that stands in the church of St Laurence in Rotterdam (129).

14 Minheer Vanderhausen has come to the house of the famous painter Gerard Douw in order to ask for the hand of his teenage niece, Rose. Rose is an orphan and has no dowry to offer a suitor, however Vanderhausen is not seeking one, rather he is offering the young woman's extended family riches beyond their dreams—an offer Douw promptly accepts. Rose is duly married to Vanderhausen and goes to live in Rotterdam

with him. She is never heard of again until she appears at her uncle's house in a terrible state, "wild and haggard, and pale with exhaustion and terror … [falling] senseless on the floor," apparently having escaped her corpselike husband, now dressed like one herself in a "white woollen wrapper, made close about the neck, and descending to the very ground" (131).

15 The episode which follows her arrival is one of pantomime comedy and pure farce (Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares* 43). When the distraught Rose arrives, Douw and his apprentice Schalken attempt to calm her down, giving her food and drink and calling for a minister of God to visit the house immediately. They manage to persuade her to rest a while in her uncle's bedroom, which she agrees to do on the one condition that she is never to be left alone, not even for a moment, or she will be "lost for ever" (132).

16 This condition, or rather supplication, is made a few times to prepare the reader for what is to follow, as is the delaying cataphoric reference to the importance of the reader "distinctly understand[ing] all the circumstances of the event which we are about imperfectly to describe" and "the relative positions of [all] the parties" concerned in the incident (133). Thus in what I read as another instance of metafictive awareness, not unlike the foregrounding of the apparently "trifling" features of Vanderhausen's appearance, the audience/reader is set up for the ensuing climatic scene. The priest arrives and talks with Schalken in the anteroom which leads to Douw's bedroom. Douw at this moment is in the bedroom with his niece and can see the two men talking quietly through the open bedroom door. There is a gust of wind; the candles in the anteroom are blown out and Douw leaves the bedroom for a second with his own candle to bring some light to the men, forgetting Rose's repeated injunctions. At this very moment the interconnecting door slams shut "as if swung to by a strong blast of wind" (134), and although Rose has already jumped up and darted after her uncle, she is too late and is trapped inside the bedroom. In a pantomime slapstick tradition, where an object plays a central role in the comedy of the moment (Stott 75), the story becomes that of three men versus a closed door. While Schalken, Douw and the priest wrestle with the handle, "shriek after shriek [comes] from the inner chamber with all the piercing loudness of despairing terror" terminating in a cry "so long and piercing and agonised as to be scarcely human" (134). Only after these cries are followed by a death-like silence do the men finally force the door, to find the room empty and the window over the canal open. The reader is not told of the plop Rose must have made as she went into the water, but the sound can almost be heard with the final tableau of the three men looking down at some suspicious ripples which indicate that a heavy mass has recently entered the water.

Comic Failure

17 Douw's absentmindedness is a moment of comic failure to keep his promise never to leave his niece alone—a promise he has made a few times that evening. Through various cataphoric references to what Douw should not do—Rose's requests "Do not—do not leave me for a moment" (132), "For God's sake …do not stir from beside me!" (133) and, just a few paragraphs later, noting her "repeated injunctions" (133), Le Fanu builds up a readerly expectation that this vital appeal will not be met. When she is (seemingly inevitably) left on her own and reclaimed by her husband, the terror of the moment is mixed with a comedy rooted in the slapstick failure to open the door.

Laughter as a response to failure involves a certain detachment, or as Bergson argues of comedy in general, it requires a "momentary anaesthesia of the heart" where the reader becomes "a disinterested spectator" (118). The reader's horror at the idea of a girl married to a corpse for money is at odds with the comedy of her uncle's failure to protect her, with the latter prompting an intellectual rather than emotional response, and a temporary suspension of sympathy for Rose.

18 In a letter to Horace Mann, Walpole argued "this world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel" (246) and in "Schalken the Painter," Le Fanu has his reader do both in a narrative which evokes terror, pathos and a certain critical amusement at Douw's ineptitude at saving his niece in what would have been some form of atonement for having sold her to Vanderhausen, or the living dead. Furthermore Le Fanu's narrator takes care to discourage a monolithic reading of a typically morbidly gothic tale of female entrapment by explicitly reminding his audience of the humour interwoven into the tale. Midway through the narrative he reflects on the purpose and intended effect of the story in a manner not unlike Walpole's 1765 preface. He interrupts the narrative to say "I have no sentimental scenes to describe, no cruelty of guardians, or magnanimity of wards, or agonies of lovers. The record I have to make is one of sordidness, *levity* and interest" (130, my emphasis). Whilst courting the involvement or interest of the reader he also looks for the detached, light-hearted response needed to recognise the humour in the tale and the comedy of Douw's failure.

19 "Green Tea" is also a story of comic failure. The narrator of the tale uses the notes of a certain Doctor Hesselius, who was approached by Jennings, the latter aware of his deteriorating mental state and growing suicidal tendencies brought on by the irregular but unshakeable presence of this simian spectre. Hesselius, as the narrative evinces, takes down copious notes and promises to investigate the case thoroughly, assuring him that his condition is an illness dependent upon purely physical causes. Such is the doctor's self-belief, he promises to give a complete diagnosis, and one presumes cure, once he has time to go over the man's symptoms in detail. In order to complete this study, Hesselius rents lodgings for the night about two miles away, where there would not be "the slightest possibility of intrusion or distraction" (27), even though he has just told Jennings to send for him immediately should the monkey reappear. Whilst Le Fanu does not set up the doctor's failure as explicitly as that of Douw, Hesselius does explain that the servant who had been sent to get him could not find anyone who could give him an address (28) and as a result, Jennings, alone at the mercy of the spectral monkey, is induced to cut his own throat. This, combined with Hesselius' admission in the prologue that he has never practised surgery as he had lost two fingers as the result of "a trifling scratch inflicted by a dissecting knife" (3), creates the picture of a man not unfamiliar with mishaps.

20 Rather than an atmosphere of tragedy, there is an overriding sense of Hesselius' defensive annoyance that he was not able to prove his theory about the dangers of excessive consumption of green tea. The final chapter, entitled "Conclusion," is in the form of a letter Hesselius sent to Professor Van Loo, defending his record. Hesselius irritatedly opens by reminding him of his past successes in treating such maladies and writes of Van Loo himself having suffered from a similar affliction, asking "Who, under God, cured you?" (31). The mild oath signals his anger and this conclusion of combative apologia suggests that he feels threatened by damage Jennings' suicide may do to his reputation and perhaps has had his inaction questioned. Hesselius refers to his fifty-

seven cases of successfully sealing a patient's inner eyes and laments Jennings' case did not become his fifty-eighth (31). Hesselius, a man who carries copies of the minor treatise he had printed, *Essays on Metaphysical Medicine*, to impress any new acquaintances—he unfailingly references it at various points in his account of Jennings' case despite its obvious inadequacy as a guide to the man's condition—is comically unaware of how his inflated ego distorts his judgement. Apart from his green-tea diagnosis, Hesselius gives a series of excuses for Jennings' condition and death. He argues that the man had not formally become his patient when he took his life, absolving himself of any responsibility; that the Reverend's father had also seen a ghost and these visions were a hereditary tendency; and that Jennings' own study of pagan metaphysics had made him vulnerable to this type of hallucinatory experience (32). He even adds as a one-line afterthought in the final paragraph that the man suffered from a hereditary suicidal mania, although there is nothing in the text to suggest that this is the case (32). Indeed, as Sullivan notes, if anyone needs therapy here, it is the good doctor himself (28). Whilst Le Fanu does not provide the slapstick comedy of failure found in "Schalken," there is a wry undercurrent in this portrait of a flawed doctor who fails to save the persecuted Jennings, or recognise his own part in the reverend's suicide.

21 Horner and Zlosnik note that the gothic's dialogue with scientific progress has often shown a propensity for the comic turn ("Gothic and Comic Turn," 17) and "Green Tea" highlights the inadequacies of the medical profession; here Hesselius' constant references to the triumph of medical research only serve to undercut the reliability of scientific enquiry by associating it with his ineffectual dealing of Jennings' case. In Le Fanu's "The Narrative of the Ghost of a Hand," Mrs Prosser discovers the true source of her baby son's paroxysms of terror when she sees the white hand sitting by the head of her child as he lies in his cot, debunking the doctors' diagnosis that this was a case of incipient water on the brain (75). In the same story, Le Fanu also satirises the Victorian reliance on empiricist methodologies and visual evidence, when Mr Prosser, on being told of the fingerprints in the dust of the parlour table, insists that all the members of the household have their fingerprints made in order to identify the culprit. Of course, there is no match. A similar misguided reliance on the corporal, the scientific to deal with spiritual matters can be seen when Prosser opens the front door in response to the incessant knocking by the ghostly hand, armed with a loaded pistol and a strong cane to defend himself (against a ghost).

22 Satire "aims to criticise or censure people and ideas through the use of humour" (Stott 199) and both "Green Tea" and "The Ghost of a Hand" comically challenge the neat epistemological truths modern science appeared to present, particularly in the case of medical science. Le Fanu satirises the Victorians' reliance on empiricism to explain and live in the world around them with the Horatian tone of a tolerant, amused spectator.[3] This is particularly evident when comparing the different narrative treatments of Hesselius and Old Sally who both relate the story of a haunting. Whereas "Green Tea" is framed by a prologue and conclusion which allude to Hesselius' failure as a surgeon and as Jennings' last hope, the opening of "The Ghost of a Hand" begins with an indulgence of Old Sally's belief that the Tiled House could well be haunted. There is a certain respect for Sally, the teller of "fabulae," which is quite distinct from the presentation of Hesselius and his story of an aborted research case. Whilst Sally and Hesselius are simply characters in two short stories, they are sufficiently representative to indicate a narrative sympathy for a belief in the existence of the supernatural and the

otherworldly, and to satirise the notion that all such things can be explained and resolved via a scientific approach.

Unreliable Narrators and Multiple Framing

23 The readerly detachment prompted by the competing effects of horror and humour in the three narratives discussed here is furthered by Le Fanu's telescopic, unreliable narration in each story. In all three cases, the story is told by a heterodiegetic narrator, the tale second or third hand. "Green Tea" is narrated by an editor, who adapts Dr Hesselius' notes, "omitt[ing] some passages, and shorten[ing] others, and disguise[ing] names" (4) to engage the reader. "A Narrative of the Ghost of a Hand" is the retelling of a story told by a local woman, Sally, who had the story passed down to her, and "A Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter" appears in Le Fanu's 1880 collection *The Purcell Papers*, a series of stories collected by the Catholic priest Father Purcell, for publication in the Protestant *Dublin University Magazine*. In the case of the Schalken story, it is told to Father Purcell by a captain Vandael, when the former asked about a picture in the captain's house. Vandael's painting is by Schalken, Douw's apprentice, supposedly of the young Rose Velderkaust and when the men discuss the portrait, Captain Vandael is prompted to tell Father Purcell Rose's story.

24 Kevin Sullivan remarks on le Fanu's skill in "distancing his material ... which, while not increasing the sense of the probable, tends to lessen the reader's concern about the improbable" (12, 15), to which I would add he nudges the reader towards picking up the comedy which lies in the ambiguities and ironies of the text situated between the various diegetic levels of the tale. Hesselius' intention of scientific explanation is at odds with the aim of the editor, who adapts the story to "amuse or horrify a lay reader" (4). Schalken's portrait of Rose is his text or testament that she was a real person whom he knew well, but Purcell's description of Vanderhausen with his stiff movements and "indescribably odd" (122) appearance belong to the fantasy world of slapstick pantomime. Old Sally's tale of the ghost of a hand is told, on request, one night to lull her young charge, Lilias, to sleep, yet her references to written witness testimonies and the narrator's own contribution that he had met a cousin of the Prossers' himself, and was told of how the baby had become a man plagued with "extreme anxiety and horror" (76), suggest that this is a verified account of the disruptive and damaging effects of a haunting, rather than a gentle bedtime story. Such structuring offers paradoxically competing narrative purposes, which, fuelled by the readerly detachment encouraged by Le Fanu's humour, lend the tales a haunting quality in their "progressively murky" (Sullivan 52) development. Le Fanu's satire, absurdities, ambiguities and lack of closure create readerly doubt and as Jack Sullivan notes "It is the quality of not knowing that makes us uneasy" (132). Certainly, Le Fanu's comic hauntings—where "funny" is both humorous and disturbing—and ambiguous narration present a challenge to the neat resolution that one would expect in a Victorian detective, adventure or even horror story. If the reader cannot accept the bumbling Hesselius' diagnosis of the case, what indeed is the cause of Jennings' monkey? If Schalken the painter is not about the cruel treatment of Rose—what is it about, and how can the story be one of "levity"? Le Fanu's mingling of horror and humour reminds us of the ghost story's function to entertain. The genre's origins lie in an oral tradition, more often than not part of an evening's entertainment, and Le Fanu's ironies, his

bathos, his metafictive awareness are shared jokes which further the sense of companionable storytelling amongst a group of friends. Although certainly written to terrify and unnerve his readers, Le Fanu's ghost stories were created to entertain and, rather like Walpole, Le Fanu considered that making his readers/listeners smirk was just as important as making them shudder.

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NOTES

1. Walpole writes "Let me ask if his tragedies of Hamlet and Julius Caesar would not lose a considerable share of their spirit and wonderful beauties, if the humour of the grave-diggers, the fooleries of Polonius, and the clumsy jests of the Roman citizens, were omitted, or vested in heroics?" (11).

2. For a discussion of the ape in Roman and Greek literature see McDermott's essays.

3. "To simplify the complex development of the genre, we can say that Horace and Juvenal are the two father figures of satire. Horace is the tolerant, urbane and amused spectator of the human scene; Juvenal is bitter, misanthropic and consumed with indignation" (Cuddon 707).

ABSTRACTS

Pour apprécier le « gothique comique » de certaines nouvelles de Le Fanu, le lecteur déconcerté et déstabilisé par la combinaison d'horreur et d'humour qu'il y trouve doit équilibrer absorption et recul critique. Cet article s'attache à la façon dont le Fanu – afin d'amuser et de terrifier ses lecteurs – recourt à l'incongru et à l'absurde, au sublime et au ridicule et à la comédie de l'échec dans trois de ses nouvelles : "A Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter", "An Authentic Narrative of the Ghost of a Hand" et "Green Tea". L'humour, combiné avec des structurations narratives originales, produit des effets mixtes, parfois paradoxaux, qui renforcent la qualité ambiguë de ses nouvelles et viennent déjouer les attentes du lecteur.

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